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ABSTRACT

Major issues raised during a meeting of representatives from ten media and educational technology units in Great Britain in 1973 are briefly discussed. Areas covered include the responsibilities of the units, organizational structure, financing, staff, and some problems of evaluation. An outline of national policy relating to these media and educational technology units provides the framework in which the service functions of the units are discussed. The suggested framework for reporting on the individual units prior to the meeting is appended. (RAO)

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Topic Paper 1

# MEDIA AND EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGY UNITS

David Warren Piper

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## Introduction

In March 1973 thirteen people drawn from the staffs of ten media and educational technology units met in a country house for two days. Prior to the meeting each unit had been invited to send one person to visit one of the other units taking part and to write a brief report on them. Five units agreed to have an outsider report upon them, five elected to write their own report.

There were eleven units reported upon; although one unit was not represented at the two-day meeting, the report was nevertheless considered. Reporters were asked to include the following information in their report:

- descriptions of the unit, of problems arising from the management of the unit, and of the attitude taken towards educational development within the institution in which the unit is situated;

- evaluation of the unit's work and of the problems of gaining acceptance of this;

- descriptions of the unit's relationships with other established sources of information for teaching staff and with bodies outside its own institution.

(a full copy of the suggested terms of reference appear as an Appendix)

On the first day of the meeting each report was presented by its author in turn, and the unit reported upon was invited to comment. As the exercise proceeded, participants were invited to identify topics raised by the reports which they wished to discuss at greater length. These were noted on a large black-board and at the end of the day arranged in some rational order.

On the second day the group discussed the topics with the purpose of trying to identify issues and dilemmas that might face a university in the process of establishing a media or educational technology unit.

The whole exercise was organised as part of the Staff Development in Universities Programme, a joint venture of the University Teaching Methods Unit and the Department of Educational Administration, financed by grants from the University Grants Committee. The SDU Programme is concerned with innovation in universities and with means of meeting the resulting learning needs of senior staff.

The article that follows is an attempted appreciation of the major issues raised during the discussion mentioned above. As the participants were drawn from only those universities which were at that time involved in the SDU Programme, they may not be taken as representing all media and educational technology unit staff throughout the country. As, however, the purpose of the article is to identify decisions and dilemmas rather than advise on solutions and policy, this unrepresentativeness may be a tolerable lack as there is no reason to suppose that those taking part had either more or less insight than the many admittedly experienced staff whose universities had not joined in the SDU Programme.

Although throughout this paper I have made every effort to represent fairly the issues raised, any errors, omissions, distortions and the placing of emphases must remain my responsibility. Each of the original participants would no doubt wish to express reservation about at least some passages.

Those taking part in the exercise were:

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| Ruth Beard | then Senior Lecturer in Charge of the University Teaching Methods Unit, University of London Institute of Education; now Professor of Education, University of Bradford. |
| Bernard Chibnall | Director, Media Service Unit, University of Sussex. |
| Michael Clarke | Director of the Audio-Visual Centre, University of London. |

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| Neville Collins | ETV Liaison Officer for Higher Education, Inner London Education Authority, University of London, and City University. |
| Robert Ferguson | Head of the Department of Educational Media, University of London Institute of Education. |
| Ken Harrison | Lecturer in New Media, Department of Educational Media, University of London Institute of Education. |
| Philip Hills | Lecturer, Institute for Educational Technology, University of Surrey. |
| Norman MacKenzie | Then Director of the Centre for Educational Technology; now Professor of Educational Technology, University of Sussex. |
| Robert Matkin | Lecturer in Charge of Educational Services, Centre for Educational Technology, City University. (Not present at the meeting.) |
| Anthony Midson | Film Producer, Audio-Visual Aids Unit, University of Surrey. |
| George Noordhof | Director of Television, Audio Visual, and Photographic Services, Brunel University. |
| Jean Rudduck | Assistant Director, Centre for Applied Research in Education, University of East Anglia. (Unable to be present at meeting.) |
| Neil Ryder | Senior Lecturer, Centre for Science Education, Chelsea College, University of London. |
| Russell Towns | Director of the Audio-Visual Aids Unit, University of Surrey. |

(iv)

Throughout the two days the Chair was taken by David Warren Piper, SDU Programme Organiser from the University Teaching Methods Unit, University of London Institute of Education. In attendance was Janine Wright, SDU Secretary.

Terms used in this article

No two of the units represented are organised in the same way or perform quite the same combination of duties. It does, however, seem useful to distinguish the media units from the rest. The focus of the activities of the media units is their technical expertise with audio-visual aids (including usually television) and their equipment. The remaining units are less clearly defined as a group but their focus tends towards the theory of education and their practical concerns centre on problems of planning and control of educational experiences. For the purposes of this article, these units are referred to as the Educational Technology Units. Each of the units involved in the exercise may be regarded as a Teaching Support Unit.

Contents

1. The article begins with some remarks about the national policy; this is by way of setting the scene and is not intended as a deeply considered analysis. The rest of the article is in three main sections:

2. The work of the units.

3. The organisation of the units, particularly their siting, where they may fit into the organisation of a university, their financing, and staff.

4. Some problems of evaluation.

Some of the remarks under each heading are pertinent to all Teaching Support Units, but for other remarks Media and Educational Technology Units are dealt with separately.

## 1.00 National Policy

### Media Units

1.01 A Times leader in 1960 confidently predicted that teaching machines would compensate for a lack of teachers, and in the years that followed few readers of the popular press could have remained unaware of this wonder of modern technology that was to revolutionise education. The advent of the teaching machine and the development of closed circuit television doubtless did much towards making investment of public money in media development a politically attractive (even glamorous) policy.

1.02 Not everybody was enthusiastic about these mechanical and electronic appurtenances to teaching; they were, for instance, seen as offering more to the sciences than the arts. Significantly the Brynmor Jones Committee set up to advise the Government on the use of audio-visual aids was restricted by its brief to Higher Scientific Education.(1) The effect of television on the rising generation was more a live issue then than it is now. There may have been some assumptions that teachers would not take too easily to the use of unfamiliar media and that students entering university would be more ready than their elders to learn by means other than the printed word. Either or both of these assumptions may well be true, but whether or not the often implied corollary that today's young people are less literate than their elders is a moot point.

1.03 However, there does seem to have been a general assumption reflected in that Committee's report and in the UGC policy of the early sixties that mechanical and electronic means of communication would both improve the quality of teaching and make it cheaper. With hindsight the issue can be seen to be rather more complicated. Although sophisticated equipment can increase the potential of what may be

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(1) Audio-Visual Aids in Higher Scientific Education, HMSO, 1965.

taught, it does not of itself guarantee that more is learned. Nor does it seem to have contributed to a diminution of costs, although no strict investigations of the matter appear to have been undertaken and few, if any, universities have an accounting system which would allow them to isolate the effect of sophisticated teaching equipment from other factors also affecting the cost and the quality of education.

1.04 At the beginning of the 1967/1972 quinquennium the UGC allocated substantial sums of earmarked money to a small number of universities designated as 'high activity centres'. This policy allowed a number of places to have enough money to establish a well-equipped media unit. Now that there is a move towards astringency on the whole of university finance, it is inevitable that the investment in media centres will come under critical review. There may be some danger that, in the name of cost effectiveness, funds to these units are now withheld on grounds perhaps as questionable as those which led to an earlier generosity. It is hoped that the points raised in this article along with others beyond its scope may be considered at national and university level in a cool appraisal of the value of such units and the level of investment in them best suited to present conditions.

1.05 There are two comments about national policy which may be raised immediately. The first is that part of the thinking behind the original designation of 'high activity centres' was that different universities would specialise in particular media. It is perhaps worth reviewing this policy in the light of recent years' experience. Investigation may reveal that this early specialisation has tended to decrease because the development of a service in one medium seems to have stimulated a demand in all other available media.

1.06 The second comment concerns one suggestion that has been floated in response to the need for economy: it is that the Open University should develop a central unit producing audio-visual materials for all universities. There is much to recommend such a

policy, especially to a cost-conscious government; and beyond the economies offered would be the educational advantage that the very best teaching materials (drawing on the work of eminent teachers) would be available to all universities. There are, however, a number of disadvantages to such a scheme which must be taken into account. There may be some virtue in diversity; the more people working separately on material, the greater the creative potential. Further, some might argue that, except where it results directly from the use of the facilities of a large studio, the work produced by the Open University is matched in quality by a number of other universities. The economy of such a scheme may also be questioned: it may be that the creation of a central service would actually increase overall expenditure by stimulating greater local demand (as it is thought to have done in Holland when a central unit was established in Utrecht). Perhaps a further point to be taken into consideration is the extent to which a local media unit can be used for purposes other than the production of teaching materials - important among these is the training of teaching staff, and the opportunity provided for students to work in media other than writing.

Educational Technology Units

1.07 There has been no national report on educational technology units and their work. The decision of the UGC to distribute grants in support of university staff training, and recent initiatives by the joint co-ordinating committee of the University Grants Committee, the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals, the Association of University Teachers and the National Union of Students, suggests that there is, de facto, a national policy emerging on staff training and development, which undoubtedly will boost this aspect of educational technology units' work. It is to be hoped that units will continue to receive central support as the growing need to educate more students with less money increases the imperative that university staff are helped to learn their work more quickly than if left to the vicissitudes of haphazard experience.

## 2.00 The Work of the Units

### Media Units

2.01 The central purpose of a media unit is the provision of a support service for teaching staff. Such support may take a number of forms: the provision of teaching material, sometimes especially produced for the occasion; advice on the selection of appropriate teaching media; and help to increase the competence of teaching staff in the use of media and in the preparation of their materials, either by instruction or by less direct methods.

2.02 With regard to the provision of material some members of the group suggested that the aim should be for most teaching departments to produce the bulk of their own teaching materials, leaving to the central Unit those items which depended upon either expensive equipment or special expertise.

2.03 When advising staff on the choice of teaching materials and the preparation of audio-visual items, it is inevitable that the professional staff of the Unit become involved in the overall planning of a course of study. There is no clear boundary here between media units and those educational technology units specialising in teaching methods. Just how far a media unit can go in this direction must depend upon the time available and also upon the expertise among the staff.

2.04 Some media units work directly with students and a number of group members suggested that this practice is likely to become more common. The purpose is to extend the range of ways in which students can present their work (in at least one university represented in the group some students had presented work for examination on video-tape). This was an example of Unit staff taking on a more overt teaching role than is the case when they are working with teaching staff, although in some respects the tasks were very similar.

2.05 One view put forward was that it should not necessarily be seen as a media unit's responsibility to store and catalogue prepared teaching materials; rather it was

suggested that this should be the responsibility of the university library working in close consultation with the media unit.

Educational Technology Units

2.06 The educational technology units were also seen to have a service function to teaching staff similar to that of the media units but their principal concerns tend to be more theoretical than a media unit and they have academic research interests.

2.07 There were also some other differences of emphasis and method. Although the educational technology unit's staff will work with a teacher on the development of a course perhaps using available media to best advantage, usually they will not be involved in the production of teaching materials (exceptions might be when the educational technology unit and the media unit are in effect combined or when new material is required for experimental purposes). It was suggested that the service provided by educational technology units tends more to emphasise the strategic planning of courses. Their main interest is methodological relating not only to the use of media in classroom techniques but also to the interpersonal relationships of those involved in teaching and learning. Some educational technology units, who take a special interest in the planning and management of courses, inevitably are concerned with some aspects of departmental organisation and the whole question of staff development.

2.08 One item put forward differentiated the central concern of media units and educational technology units. At the heart of the work of educational technology units, it was suggested, lies a responsibility for educational research and development extending beyond requirements of any particular project. Indeed, projects may be chosen just for their research interest. In this respect an educational technology unit might be regarded as being more like an academic department than would a media unit whose first priority is service. Some educational technology units particularly concerned

with teaching methods have responsibility for staff training. Furthermore, should a university offer an undergraduate or a postgraduate course in higher education or some aspect of educational technology, then the educational technology unit in contrast with the media unit would normally be wholly or partly responsible for such a course.

2.09 A further point of contrast between an educational technology unit and a media unit was advanced by some members. An educational technology unit could be consulted by teaching departments on course evaluation. To take on such a task it would require not only the expertise but the detachment from other departments to make such an evaluation. Although this, in a sense, is a service provided to an institution or to individual departments, it is regarded as requiring a strong academic base.

2.10 Some universities represented in the group had both a media unit and an educational technology unit. It was suggested that where both these functions exist in one university there is a trend now towards separating them. It was also suggested that where two units co-exist the basis of their relationship should be the same as that between any service and academic department, although their overlapping interests may make their relationship somewhat closer.

2.11 There was some discussion about relations between departments. The question of whether a media unit has good or bad relations with other departments in the university should, it was thought, arise no more than it does in the instance of a library. Ideally the same would apply for an educational technology unit although here it was admitted that there may be something of a risk particularly if the unit carries some responsibility for staff development or course evaluation, both of which involve staff in reappraisals of their own work. Such an activity is bound to raise anxieties amongst at least a few members of a large staff from time to time.

Commercial Work

2.12 Some members considered there was some virtue in both media and educational technology units undertaking a limited amount of commercial work. Some contact with industry, it was argued, (media work for media units, management development and training for educational technology units) can be exceedingly valuable. There was, however, a proviso that such work should always serve some clear university purpose other than the attraction of funds.

## 3.00 The Organisation of Units

### Physical Location and Space Requirements

3.01 It was emphasised that both media and educational technology units need a clearly definable location, a place easily recognisable to those who may call upon the unit's services, and easily accessible to all members of the university. It follows that it is desirable for a unit to be centrally placed on a campus university. There is an important political aspect of siting: a unit's location should imply that it is equally serving all departments.

### Media Units

3.02 The space requirements for a media unit are exacting. The group was of the opinion that most universities have not been sufficiently farsighted in making a proper provision. The National Council for Educational Technology paper, particularly in its recommendations on spacing and staffing, was considered far short of the mark. In order that a studio may be properly and economically used, it is necessary, it was argued, to provide a preparation area, a maintenance area, considerable storage space, a meeting room and staff offices; also room for all the support services required by television (for example, graphic design, photography, sound recording and

film). It was vital, members said, that universities establishing a new unit should look ahead to the growing needs for work and storage space which a media unit will require as it grows and diversifies its activities.

3.03 Some members of the group made a technical point concerning the spending of university funds on a wire relay system for television. The alternative is a reliance on video-tape recording and cassettes; among the virtues of this system are cheapness, better protection of confidential material and increased flexibility. A tape controlled in the lecture theatre rather than from a central point may easily be stopped or turned back by the lecturer or the students using it. A wire system, however, may suit a federal or widely scattered university in which the distances between institutions is greater than that easily covered by a technician on a bicycle.

Educational Technology Units

3.04 The space required by an educational technology unit will vary with the kind of work it undertakes but is likely to be less exacting than that of the media unit. At one extreme a teaching methods unit may require little more than staff offices and group discussion rooms with a little storage space. At the other extreme a unit undertaking research work involving media equipment will require appropriate facilities.

Position in the Organisational Structure of the University

3.05 There are administrative advantages in attaching a unit to some existing department of the university such as a Department of Education or (in the case of a media unit) to the library. These advantages (which accrue not only to the university administration offices but also to the unit itself) must be weighed against the need for political neutrality and freedom from competition within a department for space and funds. The weight of opinion within the group was in favour of both media and educational technology units being independent bodies within the university structure.

3.06 Especial attention was drawn to problems which may arise if a unit is housed in a department or attached to the library or to one institution in a federal university. The problem is this: the space required by the unit will grow in relation to its work for the whole of the university but it will be competing for space within the department or institution to which it has been attached. This, and the desireability of neutrality mentioned earlier, led some members to argue that educational technology and media units should be organisationally independent within the university structure although there may be administrative arguments for including them within other existing organisations.

3.07 A report structure similar to that for a university library was suggested, as in this way both media and educational technology units would be responsible to their university as a whole having a direct link with the Vice-Chancellor and the senior committees representing all subject areas. It was generally agreed that an advisory board or management committee could be of intermittent help, most particularly at times of a unit's growth (although the point was made that an advisory board once initiated may tend to regular and thus unnecessary meetings). Mention was made of the need for a chairman of sufficient stature to enable him to advise university authorities on the unit's needs and to help shield a unit from inevitable political pressures.

3.08 Although a formal body representing consumers may be helpful in deciding priorities between departments making claims upon the unit (particularly a media unit), there was not a great deal of enthusiasm shown for such bodies. It was emphasised that a director of a unit should have authority to make his own choice from among the requests for work submitted to him.

Finance

3.09 Teaching Support Units may be financed entirely from central university funds and then be required to provide a free service; or they may be required to raise their

own revenue by charging departments for their services. In either case the same university funds are ultimately used but the former arrangement implies a commitment at university level to the service in question; whereas the latter arrangement allows departments freedom to choose whether or not to invest money in the service at all and, if they do, when and on what they will spend their money. It may be easier to deal with media and educational technology units separately in connection with this issue.

3.10 The details of the schemes suggested below may need modification in the case of a federal university although the principles would remain the same.

Media Units

3.11 Units require sufficient guaranteed funds to cover their overheads and to give them freedom to initiate experimental and development work. A number of the group members were in favour of the marginal cost of service work (i.e. all that above the amounts attributed to overheads and development work) being set against the budgets of those receiving the service. However, it was stressed that under such a scheme there would be need of a central pool to which departments could apply for funds to undertake projects beyond the means of an individual department and which could bring returns to the university in the long run.

3.12 It was suggested that universities should give special consideration to the maximum sum which it authorises the director of a media unit to spend without reference to university committees. It may be appropriate for him to have a higher upper limit than is normal in many university departments.

Education Technology Units

3.13 Insofar as a unit acts as a research or student teaching department, there seems no reason to argue

for exceptional means of financing its operation. When a unit is involved in providing courses for staff or in offering a consultancy service to departments then the payment of fees may be appropriate. In the experience of some members of the group, university departments were unlikely to pay the full economic cost of sending one of its members on a course. Thus, as with a media unit, there was a strong argument for the costs of overheads and development work being met from centrally allocated funds leaving the marginal costs of established courses to be met from fees. There was also a case for a central fund from which departments could apply for the cost of covering the absence of staff seconded to an educational technology unit in the interests of the quality of teaching in their own department and their own career development.

## Staffing

### Media Units

3.14 Group members pointed to the need for the competence of staff of a unit to reflect a relative demand for different kinds of work: for instance, most units in fact undertake more slide preparation and sound recording than television work; the staffing should reflect the facts. Further, it was observed that the introduction of television normally increased rather than decreased demand for work with simpler methods. Only the largest units could afford to employ staff who specialised exclusively in one medium.

3.15 Media units tend to have a high initial cost. The point was made that a university may not capitalise fully on this initial outlay if it underestimates when budgeting for recurrent expenditure and future staff salaries. In this connection the point was made that, if a unit is to offer a reliable service, allowance must be made for absenteeism and illness in a way which would not be normal in an academic department.

3.16 It was suggested that the smaller a unit and the simpler its equipment the greater the technical demands made upon its staff. A small unit may be in greater need of a man of wide experience and high ability as its director than a large unit, which could possibly operate under a director whose management abilities were not matched by his technical expertise. This would be particularly true of a newly established unit which might be expected to grow over a number of years. The same argument would apply in the case of a chief technician. Consequently, it was argued, a university may advisedly consider appointing to such units people whose seniority and experience may, at first sight, seem to over-qualify them for the post.

3.17 Concern was shown over the career structure for media staff. Short-term contracts, say five years, may be more appropriate than life tenure for design and production staff. Consequently, the transfer of staff from one unit to another might with advantage be encouraged. Incentives suggested included removal grants and the extension of FSSU membership to all appointments and perhaps special attention being paid to staff development with such schemes as job rotation. One suggestion was that joint academic/producer appointments could be made more frequently than they are with considerable advantage to the departments and to the individual concerned. Some members wondered whether units themselves could not organise staff exchanges and secondment.

Educational Technology Units

3.18 Permanent posts in educational technology units may be considered as more straightforward academic appointments than those in a media unit. Apart from academic strength, experience of teaching is an obvious prerequisite. Some training in, or experience of, consultancy is an advantage and the service aspect of the work calls for organisational ability and perhaps for something of the publicist. It was thought that part-time appointments may advantageously be paired with a teaching post. The secondment of staff from a teaching department to an educational technology unit may be particularly useful for an individual wishing to

undertake some experimental or developmental work in the teaching of his specialist subject, or for staff who have a special responsibility for staff training within their own departments. It was further suggested that there may be some virtue in full-time appointments to educational technology units being alternated with some years of teaching in a straightforward academic department.

4.00 Evaluation

4.01 Three kinds of evaluation were discussed by the group: (a) The evaluation of work done by units against the objectives which they have set themselves or against the teaching objectives for the department that they are serving; (b) The evaluation of the actual objectives and of the content of teaching courses; (c) The evaluation of the service units: do they, in overall terms, give a good return on money, space, facilities and manpower invested. The evaluation of procedures against objectives was seen as part of the normal work of both media and educational technology units. Media units are perhaps specifically involved in the education of teaching procedures whereas an educational technology unit may have broader interests.

4.02 In connection with the evaluation of departmental or course objectives, three major points were made: (a) Educational Service Units have responsibility for reviewing their own teaching development objectives in the same way as any other department. (b) When working with teaching departments it is usually no part of the service unit's business to pass critical judgement on the subject content. However, there may be occasions when the distinction between content and method is difficult to maintain. (The medium and the method always have a message of their own.) Educational technology units particularly may wish to advise on the mental processes that students are learning in order to cope with the subject matter presented in various ways (e.g. learning facts by heart, learning how to ascertain facts quickly).

(c) A university has an overall responsibility for the evaluation of what is taught in its departments. That is necessary, not only for the maintenance of standards but also for the distribution of scarce resources. Members of the group were of the opinion that should an educational technology unit become involved in this process it should be in the capacity of consultant to the university on procedures and methods rather than as the university's agent or as an adjudicator. (Departments may request aid with the evaluation of their own courses, in which case a mutually acceptable consultancy/client relationship can be forged.)

4.03 The estimation of the total worth of a service unit to the university meets with the same problems as the evaluation of the work of any part of the university. In the final analysis it becomes a matter of judgement about the quality and type of education to be provided. Certainly exclusive reference to financial criteria would not be sufficient any more than it would in the case of, say, a library. Albeit in its service function a unit is helping teaching departments realise their own purposes, it is nonetheless making a direct contribution to the educational experience of students; that is not to be totted up only in pounds and pence.

Appendix

The full text of the suggested framework for reporting on the units (see Introduction) was as follows:

1. Description of the Unit

   - unit's name
   - number and level of staff
   - unit's position in the formal organisation of the university
   - method of finance and annual budget

2. The attitude to educational development taken generally in the university

   - any formal statement made of university policy on educational development
   - any formal brief given to the unit; the terms of the unit's remit
   - an informal assessment of the attitudes of teaching staff to the unit

3. Problems arising from the management of the unit

   - organisational structure
   - balance between media services and methodological activities (e.g. curriculum development)
   - means of control exercised by university (money, policy, staffing)
   - financial arrangements (budgeting, accounting degrees of discretion)

4. Evaluation of unit's work

   - means of monitoring effectiveness
   - means of current and past strategies for self-evaluation
   - success in changing unit's work in the light of evaluation

5. Problems of gaining acceptance of unit's work within the university

   - promotion of the unit and its work
   - strategies for gaining acceptance
   - overcoming resistance to change
   - unit's role as a change agent in the university

6. Unit's relationship with other established sources of information for teaching staff

   - organisational relationship to library, resources units, other media or educational technology staff
   - working relationship with other units
   - relationship with information from students: assessment schemes, examination
   - relationship with other university committees

7. Relations outside the university

   - contacts with industry
   - contacts with other similar units
   - contacts with other universities
   - publicity, house style, publications